



Summary:

Medieval Britain was the period 1250 – 1500 also known as the Middle Ages. It covered the period from the 13th to the 16th centuries. The Catholic Church dominated medieval society. Supernatural ideas were common. This influenced people’s beliefs about the causes of illness, how to treat illness and prevention. Any rational explanations were based on the Ancient World or they referred to traditional remedies.

Key Terms

Theory of the Four Humours –

Created by the Greek doctor **Hippocrates** after he observed and recorded the symptoms of his patients. This was the belief that the body was made up of four humours (Blood, Phlegm, Yellow Bile and Black Bile) and that they had to be in balance for a healthy person.

Theory of Opposites –

Galen developed the Four Humours by suggesting the humours could be rebalanced by using the Theory of Opposites. He said too much phlegm was caused by the cold so use the opposite, such as hot chillies to treat people. Galen believed in the idea of the human soul and this fitted the teachings of the Church who therefore promoted the idea of Galen.

The Church –

The Catholic Church was the centre of life in Medieval England and was the source of all explanations. They played a key role in the care of the sick through the monasteries and the training of physicians as they controlled all libraries. As a result dissection was not allowed and teaching relied upon the books from the Ancient World, particularly Galen.

Medieval Power –

The King had absolute power with the Church holding considerable control and influence. People followed the King and the Church without question. Their authority was unchallenged.

Attitudes in Society –

Religious beliefs in the middle ages dominated medical thinking. Galen’s ideas continued to dominate as they were accepted by the Church and this meant that people did not accept new thinking that challenged the ideas of Galen.

Key words:

Amulet	A charm that was said to bring protection from disease.
Apothecary	A medieval pharmacy or chemist
Astrology	Study of the planets and its effect on humans
Barber Surgeon	Untrained surgeon who carried out basic surgery.
Black Death	Term to describe the bubonic plague of 1348 - 49
Diagnosis	Identify the nature of the illness after identifying the symptoms.
Cupping	Using glass cups to draw blood to the surface.
Epidemic	Widespread outbreak of a disease
Flagellant	People who whipped themselves to show God they repented their sins and wanted forgiveness.
Leeching	Using leaches to bleed a patient.
Miasma	‘Bad air’ – blamed for the spread of disease
Monastery	A building where monks live, eat and pray.
Pestilence	A fatal epidemic disease – Black Death.
Physician	Male medically trained doctor.
Pilgrimage	Journey to a religious shrine.
Purging	To rid the body of excess blood or vomit.
Quarantine	Separating the sick to stop the spread of disease.
Rational	An idea based on logic
<i>Regimen Sanitatis</i>	A set of instructions about how to stay healthy.
Supernatural	Ideas unable to be explained by science.
Superstition	A belief not based on knowledge but on religion, witchcraft or astrology
Urine chart	Helped to diagnose an illness based on colour.
Vademecum	Medieval ‘medical’ book carried by doctors.
Wise woman	Female healer who used herbal remedies to heal the sick.

Key events:

- 1123 – Britain’s first hospital St.Bartholemews was set up in London.
- 1348 – 9 – The Black Death killed 40% of the British population.
- 1350 - The average life expectancy was 35 years.
- 1388 – Parliament passed the first law requiring the people to keep the streets and rivers clean.
- 1400 – There were 500 hospitals in Britain.